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[Request for a retrospective comment by me to accompany a dinner honoring Arthur Sulzberger and Kay Graham on 25th anniversary of the PP]

25 years later, we still do not have any of the Pentagon Papers of the Nixon era, to answer the questions: What was Richard Nixon's policy on Vietnam? What were his aims, what was his strategy, how did these contribute to the prolongation of the war for six years and the addition of 25,000 names to the Vietnam Memorial, and what helped finally to bring the war to an end?

We don't have memos, transcripts or summaries of meetings and conversations, estimates, proposals, official decisions, comparable to those in the Pentagon Papers, for the Pentagon, the State Department, the JCS, CIA, or the White House, or what would be even better, tapes from the White House of conversations on these matters between the President and his advisors. All of these exist, but they have neither been declassified and officially released after a quarter of a century, nor did any one of more than a hundred officials and aides whose access to such data under Nixon was at least as good as mine was for the earlier era reveal these documents while he was in office or later.

Neither the New York Times nor the Washington Post showed much curiosity about these questions at the time or later, and I'm not aware that either of them ever pursued an active investigation of them or of the underlying documents. I believe they both had it wrong, at the time and to this day, when it comes to answering the question, How did Richard Nixon's policy in Vietnam really differ from LBJ's? (I believed then, and still more now: Not much. That's why the effects were so similar: 30,000 US dead under Johnson, 25,000 under Nixon: and without an antiwar movement, it could have been a lot more under either of them, and hundreds of thousands more Vietnamese dead.)

Neither did Sulzberger or Graham, or anyone under them, ever show any curiosity about a question that is much less important but which would have led them to the ones above: Why did I give them the Pentagon Papers?

(Pat: why did I "allegedly" give them the Papers? Why did I say I did? Well, the answer to the latter is obviously, to gain publicity. Though if the publicity had been limited to what I got from their papers, it wouldn't have been very gratifying. But if I actually did give them to the newspapers, why did I do that, other than to be able to say I did?)

Because I didn't have documents on the Nixon policy. If I had had comparable evidence on Nixon's strategy directly, I would scarcely have bothered to put out historical records on his

predecessors.

My concern was entirely with the direction, aims, and prospects of Nixon's Vietnam policy, with exposing it and changing it, not at all with setting the historical record straight about earlier policy. I was interesting in publication of the Pentagon Papers only to the extent this might serve the former purpose, lacking more direct documentation of Nixon's own strategy. There was only a chance it would serve this at all, and indeed, it scarcely did so.

In large part this failure ever to recognize Nixon's true policy and its impact was because neither of these papers showed any interest in investigating it. For one thing, they weren't even interested in my views on it (which matters only because I was one of the few people who took this question seriously and had views on the answers). They sent no reporters to ask me, either what I thought Nixon's policy was or (what would have led to the same answer) why I had revealed the Pentagon Papers, and they showed no curiosity themselves. I've never met Sulzberger and haven't talked to Kay Graham five minutes (I've shaken her hand on two occasions).

Two journalists, Seymour Hersh and, ten years later, Arnold Isaacson, have actually pursued this story and confirmed my own understanding of it, on the basis of interviews, showing that it could be done even without getting documents. But--perhaps, in part, because of the lack of documents--their findings have been largely ignored, with little impact on understanding of Nixon's continuation of the war by other journalists, politicians or scholars.

The publication did not lead (I'm still not quite sure why) to Congressional hearings on Nixon's current policy, and whether it might not be as hidden from Congress and the public, as deceptive, and as unpromising and fraught with danger of escalation as that of his four predecessors. Nor did their own reading of the Papers they were publishing lead any newspapers to pursue these questions.

As late as Nixon's death, the Washington Post characterized his Vietnam policy, briefly, as an effort to end the war, without explaining or even addressing why, then, the war went on for six more years with the human and societal costs that entailed for the two countries.

There were eight years of heavy American ground involvement in that year, and we still have a lot to understand about the last four of them, and why they ended when they did. It would be a worthy objective for the New York Times and the Washington Post to commit to, that by the 50th anniversary of their publication of the Pentagon Papers--dare we hope by the 30th?--the corresponding Nixon

and Ford documents and tapes on the last six years of the war will be available to the American public.